

INDIANS OF THE URBAN SLUMS:  
FIELD NOTES FROM MINNEAPOLIS

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When I went out to question people about Indians in their vicinity I often got the impression that they didn't believe I was from the University. I had the feeling they thought I was from either the Better Business Bureau, the Equal Opportunity Center, or some other agency on that order. One reason I received this feeling, I think, is because of the strange way they looked at me after I told them why I had come. Then they would usually say, just as I was ready to leave, "Even though we don't have any Indians working for us now we try to be a business where anyone can come and work," or "We try to give an equal chance to everyone."

Gary D. Skovbroten

### Editors' Comments

Mr. Skovbroten and Miss Wolens, the collectors of the edited field notes contained in this summary of Northside Minneapolis interviews, were students at the University of Minnesota during the spring of 1970. Both were enrolled in a graduate-undergraduate course entitled Urban Indians in the United States (A.I.S. 121), taught by one of the editors. Both students are white and both were, at the time of their field work, just beginning to read the required materials of the course. We have edited and reproduced these particular observations because of their technical superiority (in context), and their exhibited professional unfamiliarity with urban Indians.

In a time of criticism directed against both 'Indian experts' and 'expert Indians' for their arrogance in seeking and publishing information about Indians, naivete can have a place, especially where points of view differ among warring Indian factions and quibbling professional groups. While our point of view is, and has been, that well-meaning or self-serving romanticism from whites is as deadly to American Indian futures as the exclusionary, entrepreneurial politics of 'successful' urban Indian Chiefs, and that clear competence in dealing with the environment is an absolute prerequisite for the renaissance of Indian 'pride,' others feel differently about so 'white' an approach to the difficulties faced by Indians. We think they forget certain demanding -- and ubiquitous -- claims on human beings made by virtually all technical-bureaucratic societies, and that the fabled post-industrialism of the future must ultimately rest on the antecedent activities of participating men and women. Mr. Skovbroten speaks to these concerns when, after his first experience with field work concerning urban Indians, he writes: "I found that there were three main problems when going out to the different sites. These three problems were Indians, myself, and the people I spoke to."

These words indicate a refreshing catholicity to us in this, the first of several slum-focused reports on urban Indians from selected University of Minnesota student projects. To us the reports are basically honest and remarkably free of excessive chauvinism and romanticism, faults so often correctly attributable to warring factions and quibbling professionals.

## PUBLIC AGENCIES AND CHURCHES

### A Northside Poverty Program

We apparently looked for Indian programs in the wrong place, because the receptionist directed us to "Indian experts" across the street. There we were shown into the office of \_\_\_\_\_ (an Indian) who was not present at first. But a young Indian man was around and we explained what we were there for. He showed us an article he had written about Indians for the local University newspaper. When asked what his connection to the poverty office was, he explained that he had once worked there. Now he had a new location and office where he did something with housing problems. Then he began a long discourse on the titles and offices with which he was affiliated, while totally avoiding the mention of any specific activities on his part. He dropped his facade as soon as we talked about other matters like the Navy, and the Phillipine Islands where he had once located before he decided to "come back and help in this country."

The Indian person we had come to see returned from an Indian teen club where she had been helping with an art show. She said she was beginning studies at a local university. She said there were four Indians on the staff at the poverty center. She carefully delineated their titles and traced the structure of their projects but omitted any specifics about what they actually did. She told us her life story, step by step, including how she had organized and operated programs only to be regarded as a clerk.

Others (non-Indians) get involved and take all the honor and money. I'm not interested in position but I did (here, she enumerated several programs) do all the work in those programs and I got no credit. Only Indians can help Indians. They won't go to others. It is time we Indians were given a chance to run things our own way.

She settled a relocation problem over the telephone and turned to us to say, "I handle five or six like this each day."

I mentioned a woman I know who has studied Indian culture and problems extensively and wants to teach about it. The Indian woman's response was that "the only Indian expert is an Indian." When I suggested that there might be a place for well-meaning non-Indians, she turned off and icily noted, "Well, we could talk forever and get nowhere." She continued to stare at us and indicated the door with her finger.

#### A Northside Settlement House

Originally founded as a resting-place for travelers, this Northside settlement house has served more recently as a recreation center for the surrounding community. The director, a light-skinned, poised black, was interviewed. I did not ask if he was part Indian. He told us that there were very few Indians in the community, and then elaborated from there:

A few children use the Center. They just wander in for recreation. We had one bad incident this year. A little pre-schooler appeared every day, all day, and was not registered. When we went to her home to get the registration, the mother was very wary.

Indians have terrible problems. He is doomed either way. He has been broken physically, emotionally, psychologically. On the reservation he has to contend with that monstrous BIA. In the city he doesn't even have that. If I were in charge, I would take all the money going into the BIA, give every person a guaranteed annual income which would come to probably \$6500, and their independence. (Later, he revised this to every family, or perhaps tribe, depending upon the individual make-up).

He diluted this suggestion somewhat by suggesting perhaps every household should receive the money, and that some of it should be used to provide services. When I mentioned the recent case of graft at Rosebud reservation and suggested it might be a likely problem in his program, he said:

There has always been graft, and there always will be. Blacks steal from blacks, Indians from Indians, and whites from whites -- as well as from each other. We have no specific problems here at the Center. We don't put any pressure on Indians -- they come only if they want. They have real problems with housing because of their broader definition of family. Public housing and the health department limit the number of persons in public housing. Indians consider cousins and friends as family and home is open to them in the

city. This causes many problems. Residency rules are also stifling for an Indian.. I think the Indian incurs more prejudice than a black man.

The Northside settlement house had no Indians on the staff at the time of our interview. The organization did have one Indian with VISTA, but there were no Indian programs. The director suggested that they might plan a week of Indian activities after a planned move.

#### A North Branch of the Public Library

We interviewed two public librarians from this small, old facility. They said they have a few regular Indian patrons -- three girls who skip school many mornings, a family with several small boys, a few miscellaneous children and an occasional drunk. A weekly Indian culture class run by a local university is held in the library. None of the people in it are Indian. Last fall, the children's librarian used an Indian theme for a book festival. She arranged to have an Indian from a local poverty program to come and tell folk tales, but he never arrived, so she gave up. The two public librarians said they had little knowledge of Indian problems.

#### A Northside Salvation Army Store

When we first walked into the Salvation Army store and told the head lady why we had come, the first thing she said was "I'm the wrong one to ask because I've had nothing but trouble with them in here." But as we stimulated discussion a bit more she informed us that there were only a few Indians left in the immediate slum area. Most of them were "old drunks" that "didn't have any place to sleep except in the box cars down on the railroad tracks." We were told that Indians would come into the store and beg for things which would be stolen if not offered.

Once the Indians stole a bubble-gum machine that used to set over by the door. They took it just to get the few pennies that were inside. They just wanted enough money to buy a bottle of wine. If they wanted to, they could get lodging, food, and work at the agency, but that won't go. They all have a very poor education, because they are lazy.



The head lady at the Northside Salvation Army store told us that "once in a while, a family will come in to buy something and if they don't have enough money to pay for it we will cut the price on the item." She said the only kind of checks Indians get for use in their store are from ADC and welfare. She thought the Indians should stay on the reservation where they can be helped and directed as to where they should spend their money in order to make wiser investments. Near the end of the interview, she said she did not judge all the Indians by the ones in the near-by slum area, because "they are much worse than the ones along \_\_\_\_\_ Avenue." She thought Indians were much worse than blacks or whites who had identical problems with poverty.

#### A Northside Salvation Army Bookstore

The man we interviewed in the bookstore said that he had had very little contact with local slum Indians. He explained this lack of contact by saying that Indians rarely came in to buy anything in the store, and when they did, it was never to buy a book. It was always magazines. He said the reason Indians buy only magazines is because they probably can't read. He said that "Indians have just as much of a chance as anyone else, but they just don't have any will-power." He noted no basic differences between the Indians in the nearby slum and the ones along \_\_\_\_\_ Avenue. He attributed the Indian's way of life to different Indian tribal characteristics. He noted that agencies are available to all Indians, but that they don't ever make use of them. The bookstore man concluded with some observations about Indian city adaptation: When Indians first arrive in the city, he said, the women are very shy. "But as time goes on, they become more like the men. They start going out and getting drunk and finally leave the family."

#### A Northside Revival Mission

While talking to the janitor at the mission, we learned that there is a service every evening, after which a meal is served. There are usually thirty to forty senior citizens at these meetings, and about six of them are Indian. The janitor said it was probably the only meal they would have all day. Once a week there is a meeting in the daytime for the ladies. Large groups come

over from the \_\_\_\_\_ Avenue area in a bus. There is a service, a luncheon, and later clothing for the ladies to take home. The janitor continued that they never had anything stolen from their mission, but they have had problems with Indians who had been drinking and had become "quite violent."

#### A Northside Funeral Chapel

The funeral director said that his organization had held no Indian burials, but the chapel on \_\_\_\_\_ Avenue, also run by the firm, handles many Indian burials. The director stated that Indian burials do not differ from others because they are all Christian ceremonies. Payment is a problem, however, because Indians "just don't have the money." Some welfare programs end up paying for all of it, or some of it, he stated, adding that "sometimes they send the body back to the reservation." He concluded with the assurance that, even if Indians don't have the money, "we will help them."

#### A Northside Baptist Church, Seminary, and School

We barely missed being able to talk with the minister, so we talked with a man working in the yard:

There are very few Indians coming to the church, just a couple of children who come on the bus from the housing project to Sunday school. Their parents just want to get rid of them. There aren't many living around here. There is an Indian church down the street. I suppose they go there. We have Negroes who come to our church. That is more than other churches in the area. Go to a Lutheran church and see.

The Northside church, seminary, and school is building a large, three-story addition to the school. Tuition is \$115 annually. Membership, we were told, is multiplying because:

The public schools grow more godless, what with their sex education, teacher strikes and communist influences.

We were given church propaganda and managed to escape with our souls intact.

## NORTHSIDE RETAIL STORES

### A Northside Drug Store

We interviewed a female cashier and druggist at a Northside drug store. Both were middle-aged and had worked there for some time.

The female cashier estimated that twenty percent of their customers were Indian. She guessed that Indians bought just like anyone else -- pop, hair preparations, etc. The druggist interjected that Indians didn't buy much from the pharmacy, and that they cashed many checks. Several of the Indians, he said, cashed checks from a lumber company. Some, he said, were on ADC and welfare but not in as high a proportion as Negroes. The female cashier said that the store had had no special problems with Indians but the druggist interjected that there was a problem with pilfering. The cashier demurred, claiming that pilfering wasn't any more prominent among Indians than other groups. When asked about problems of Indians from the reservations, the cashier replied:

Oh, come to think of it, we did have some trouble with Indians a while back. They had just come down to the city and were stealing rubbing alcohol and after-shave lotions to drink.

### Another Northside Drug Store

We interviewed the assistant manager of a second Northside drug store. The man was quite hostile and cautious. He said that no Indians worked there and that few customers were Indians, perhaps ten a day.

They are all on ADC and come in to get the pill.

### A Northside Family Department Store

The manager of this cut-rate clothing store estimated that three to five percent of his customers were Indian, adding that there had been a noted increase recently. As a group, he said, Indians have more check bounce, or

attempt to pass stolen checks. Two years ago, he went on, a woman passed a \$200 dollar government check that turned out to be stolen and the FBI is still seeking her.

It is really complicated because they move so often. Many don't have current identification. Otherwise they seem to disappear. As a result, we take no more big checks. Everyone on the Avenue has the same problem. Indians seem to have money around the first of the month, but by the twentieth they come in to ask for two or three dollars. It is hard not to give it to those you know. Many are on ADC. Women seem to carry the brunt of the responsibilities. The man often leaves and goes to Montana for a few weeks, leaving her to hustle for food for the kids. There is lots of drinking among the Indians.

The manager commented that "it is really hard for any minority group" and that it was doubly difficult for those coming from the reservations to adjust to "our ways."

#### A Discount Gasoline Station

We interviewed the manager of the gasoline station and a young employee. The interview went as follows:

We had an Indian working here for quite a while. He was a hard worker, did a good job. Then he just didn't come back one day. He didn't call or anything. He didn't show up for a month and by that time I guess he was too embarrassed so he sent his wife in for his money. It's sad, but they don't seem to have any responsibility. They just don't care. You can fire them, you can throw them in jail, it doesn't make any difference to them.

We have a lot of Indian customers. They have a dollar in their pocket, they spend it. So do I. We don't have any problems in here. Once in a while a drunk will come in and I'd rather handle anyone than a mean Indian. They can really cause you trouble. You can really tell the ones from the reservation. When they first come down, they are really wild. A sad thing happened out front a couple of months ago. A bunch from the reservation came down for a Saturday night fling. They drove in on Sunday morning so staggering drunk they were falling over each other. One man was minus a leg, and when he fell down, they couldn't get him up.

They couldn't help him up because they were all too drunk. No sense of responsibility. Then when they've been down here for a while, some of them straighten up. The Chief is a good example. When he came down, he was pretty wild. He stole, cause what can they

do to you? No responsibility. They don't care. They would either get sent to jail or back to the reservation. He works now. Goes in regularly. He works in a \_\_\_\_\_ place. He's even cutting down on his drinking. We praise him whenever he comes in.

The other man we interviewed in the discount gasoline store agreed with almost everything the first had said. He wholeheartedly agreed about the Chief, adding that quite often the Chief comes in and borrows money from him. He never has to worry about it. He gives him as much as ten dollars and it is always repaid. He himself grew up near Indians in the north country:

The Indians really got wild when they got drunk. Wild and mean, but if one is your friend, he is with you forever. Couldn't find a better friend to help you any time.

#### A Northside Furniture Store

The salesman in the furniture store said they had a few Indian customers, mostly from working families.

They really live in bad housing. We have delivered furniture to some horrible places. Another major problem Indians have is credit. When they come from the reservation, they don't have any credit. Almost all Indians buy on credit, so they usually buy something small and pay on time payments to build it up.

#### Another Northside Furniture Store

The man we interviewed explained that he was just a salesman and didn't know anything about Indians. He did say that there were none working in the store, but they had a few Indian customers, and that they had generally been "poor payers."

#### A Northside Sewing Shop

The person we interviewed turned out to be the only Indian working there. He estimated that there were probably five or six employees in total. He was quite embarrassed about the whole thing. He said he was a quarter Cherokee, but:

I wasn't raised with Indians -- I was raised by my aunt and uncle. They have no Indian patrons.

A Northside Supply Company

The Northside supply company we contacted gave us the following information;

We have no Indian employees and no contact with them at all.

A Northside Shoe Store

The owner of the shoe store commented on how Mondays were such slow days;

We used to be busiest on Friday nights and Saturdays. Now, no one comes out after dark on Friday night. Not since all the trouble on \_\_\_\_\_ Avenue. There usually isn't any trouble, but the people are leery.

The owner said he had a few Indian customers, but most of his business came from Negroes and whites:

I'd rather work with colored people any day. Their kids behave. They are pleasant. White kids come in and scream and holler. They get into everything and complain about everything.

A Used Car Lot

The person interviewed was one of the salesmen on the lot. He said that there were no Indians working there and that there were only a few who had come in to purchase cars. When queried about any special problems in receiving pay from Indians, he stated that all loans must be cleared to the bank. He didn't think that there was a higher percentage of Indians being turned down. When asked if he had run into difficulties when Indians returned to the reservations with cars and stopped payments, he said that he had had no problems of this sort. He seemed unaware that cars cannot be impounded on some reservations. He estimated that five percent of their customers were Indian, many of them sent down from a Northside teen center. He referred us to another man on the lot

who lived in the area and who knew a lot more about Indians' living habits."

The second man interviewed said that they were having nothing but problems with Indians all the time ("stealing and drinking are the biggest problems"). He mentioned a group of young boys living up the street:

They are always drunk and causing trouble. A man up the street has been robbed twice in the last month and his daughter had her purse stolen. He would be a good one for you to talk to about Indians.

When asked where the Indians got money for drinking, the man replied that he didn't believe that any of them had jobs. ("They probably go out and steal for the money").

#### Another Northside Used Car Lot

The salesman in the second used car lot said that very few Indians came in as customers. They had no Indian employees and none he could remember. He said Indians always bought used cars, never new ones. The Indians he dealt with were all employed because their loans were all cleared by the banks. He didn't think there was any discrimination regarding loans.

#### A Northside Auto Parts Store

This cluttered auto store, filled with parts and accessories had a complete set of shoplift prevention and detection devices in operation. We got the manager to look up from his desk long enough to affably respond that he paid no attention to Indians, because he "treats each customer as a human being." The rebuff might have been the result of our omitting to state our mission clearly. It might have been his way of treating all his customers as human. We simply don't know.

Another Northside Auto Supply Store

The man interviewed said they had little contact with the public. They had only three employees -- none of them Indian. He said that it was possible that a few had come in looking for work but he was not sure. He felt that an Indian was just like anyone else and that it would be as easy for them to get a job. But:

They get so much money from the government that they don't feel they need to work. After all, anybody who can find an easier way of making a living will do it that way, won't he?

A Northside Cycle Supply Shop

The owner of the cycle supply shop said that he hadn't had an Indian working for him in two years. When he did, he had a lot of problems with the one Indian who had worked for him. The Indian would "go downstairs and get drunk all of the time," a problem which made the shop continuously short of help. He stated that very few Indians came into the store anymore. A few different families did come in once in a while, "and they have always paid in cash for anything they've ever bought -- they never paid by check."

Younger ones come in once in a while to buy handle grips for their bikes, but that's about all. I figure that the Indians usually go to a discount store to buy their bikes.

He also said that there were very few Indians around his area any more, and most of these were older persons.

A Northside Specialized Clothing Shop

While looking at the different articles of clothing in the shop, we were able to ask a salesgirl a few questions. She told us that there was only one Indian working for them now, that he was down in shipping and receiving. She said that as far as she knew, they "have never had any problems with them." She went on to say that very few Indians came into the shop:



Once in a while a couple of Indian women will come in and buy some raw leather goods. They never buy clothes that are finished off. It's less expensive for them if they make their own clothes themselves.

#### A Northside Grocery and Liquor Store

The storeowner stated that there were no Indians living on the Island anymore, but "they do hang around all of the time, waiting for the lunch line to open." He said that Indians are much worse than blacks when it comes to keeping property "nice":

Put them in a newly painted place and in a month it is wrecked. Rent to one and you have twenty living there. They live like pigs. Windows are broken. The place is unbelievably dirty.

We asked another man in the store if there were any Indians left on the Island, and the latter said no. Then we asked if any Indians were just hanging around, and the man agreed that they were. Finally he asked the man "just how do you get rid of them?" The man answered that he wished he knew how. The owner commented that "if you kick them out of one area, they go into the next one. East \_\_\_\_ Street is having trouble now." He thought it a big mistake to have Indians dispersed all over the city ("if we keep them within a few blocks, at least we'll know where they are."). He went on to say that the police will pick up a white man before they would a black or an Indian because the latter would "yell prejudice." "Besides," he added, "they would be set loose the following morning if they were picked up."

The store owner believed that reservations can't be closed rapidly because the Indians have to be educated to our ways, and it is a slow process:

An educated Indian doesn't want to be like other Indians. I know a girl who worked as a maid. She was educated in white schools and she doesn't get drunk or like the other things that Indians do.

You have to be firm from the beginning when you are dealing with Indians. You must be tough and make sure that you back up anything that you say or else they will walk all over you. If you tell them that you will throw them out if they don't behave and they don't you must follow through. This way, the rest of your Indian customers know that you mean business and will respect you more.

The owner also believes there is "too much welfare." He would not let anyone starve, but "they must have the incentive to go out and find work." He says that the Indians he deals with "don't work:"

Some get jobs but they don't keep them very long, because they either get drunk or they don't show up for work. They are very unreliable.

Finally, the owner of the combination grocery and liquor store had some advice for the interviewers:

I'm glad that you two aren't some of those Edina do-gooders. They don't know what they're talking about. They came down and picketed my store earlier this year. We had a little trouble here. Let them picket. I had Northeast behind me. Anyway, I'm glad you people are coming out and asking the people who really know about the Indian problem.

#### A Northside Liquor Store

While talking to the owner of a small Northside liquor store, we were told that there are very few Indians because the city is trying to clean up the area "and so there are very few Indians left around." He stated that "all the Indians who do come in buy only wine -- wine is much cheaper than anything else." All customers must pay in cash at the store, but if they are a few cents short the owner "jsut lets it ride." While we were standing with the owner during our interview, an Indian came in to purchase a bottle of wine. The owner placed the bottle on the counter and a cigarette on top of that. He did this simply and without fanfare, just as a touch of kindness.

#### A Northside Grocery Store

The manager of the grocery store said that a good five percent of his customers were Indian. He felt that he saw a good cross section of the Indian population;

They generally don't buy luxury items like frozen pizza or oysters. They tend to buy staples and fresh meat. This could be due to a lack of refrigeration. Most customers are gainfully employed. Most

bring in payroll checks. Many women work as domestics. There are few welfare or ADC checks. We have no Indian employees.  
[Emphasis added.]

#### A Second Northside Grocery Store

The cashier in this second grocery store, a small one, seemed hesitant to discuss Indians. She said that very few Indians came in, perhaps one to two a day. One family up the street, she said, were regular customers and "they are on ADC." She commented that there were very few Indians in the area and that she had not noticed any differences in shopping habits.

Some use food stamps, but they can only be used for edibles.... no cigarettes or other things.

#### A Third Northside Grocery Store

We interviewed a young cashier who was only a part-time employee. She felt that her range of experience was limited, but we suggested that a cashier might be able to give more detail than a manager. The cashier stated that the store had no Indian employees, and that most of their customers were white, "colored," and Indian in that order.

Indians seem to buy the cheapest things -- the cheapest cuts of meat, even pig's ears. they buy staples. Very seldom do they purchase fancy things. Most cash ADC or relief checks. We have no special problems with Indian customers.

#### A Northside Cafe

We started our interview at a cafe, speaking to one of the waitresses there. She mentioned that there had been Indians who had come in, "usually a pretty small percent." She appeared to have no particularly strong feelings about Indians:

Most of them that come in order meals. A few of them have tried to leave without paying, but that is nothing unusual here.

The waitress mentioned that she felt the Indians living in Minneapolis were "a lot better off and a lot cleaner than the ones up North." She said she had lived near Aitkin for a while, and had been in the Twin Cities for about sixteen years and in her experience, the Indians were much better off in the urban area -- a discovery which initially surprised her. She mentioned that Indians usually came in around the first of the month, implying that they had received some sort of aid about this time. She mentioned a "little problem" with some Indians who drank, but this did not appear to be a major concern.

#### Another Northside Cafe

We interviewed the female owner of a small Northside cafe. She had some very strong feelings about Indians, declaring at first that they were "dirty, greasy, and grimy," and that there "wasn't anything good about them." At one point she turned to the cook and asked if he would agree with such remarks, and the cook said "the only good Indian is a dead Indian."

However, these feelings seem to be passing, and as we got into a conversation, her bitterness towards Indians appeared to diminish. She mentioned that Indians were about one-third of her customers, and allowed that if they were not "drunk or young," there was really "no difference in them as far as customers." She mentioned that alcohol was a definite problem for Indians, and that when Indians did come in and gather around a particular booth, they were more boisterous and seemed intent on pointing out to her that "we had stole their land from them, and had misused this land." The owner felt that Indians were more destructive than blacks, particularly with regard to home maintenance. She added that a Northside center was also a problem, as it appeared to be a place where Indians could gather into gangs.

## SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

### A Northside Chiropractor

The chiropractor said he had no Indian patients except one "half-breed" of German and Indian descent. When asked why, he suggested that poor people usually seek medical help only for very serious matters, never sprains, strains or psychosomatic illnesses. He recollected two Indian patients of long ago. One had a back so crippled he couldn't walk, and the other was a lady with a partially paralyzed face. He also commented that Indians probably receive aid at the government clinics or through other agencies. He did say that he had never had a referral from one of those agencies. When asked about the Indian Church next door he said it was a very small congregation and that none of them had ever come to him.

### A Northside Dentist

The dentist's office was located above some commercial buildings. It was small, old, and hardly thriving. The dentist said he had a few Indian patients, about one a month.

They are good customers. They don't complain or fuss. They are much better to work on than Negroes. Negroes are so talkative. I haven't had much trouble collecting payments, but I adjust my prices. Many are on ADC.

I suppose many of them come down from the reservation. I would say that adult Indians probably have the worst teeth of any group in the community. My experience is rather limited but it could well be attributed to lack of fluoridation on reservations or improper diet.

### A Northside Loan Company

We talked to a middle-aged male credit interviewer. He said they had no Indian employees, although once in a while they had Indians who wanted loans, usually car loans. They were sent over from the car dealer, many coming from Chevrolet. The credit interviewer said that Indians were treated equally for loans, and that they seemed to pay as well as any other group. He

believed that Indians would be happier up on the reservation if they could be gainfully employed, as in South Dakota.

They like the out-of-doors. They don't like the city and the crowds and the dirt and noise. If there was some way of earning a decent living up there, I think they would be happier up there. Most of them are blue collar workers. We prefer blue collar workers. We trust someone with a lunch box. An Indian's biggest problem is getting credit for a house, just as it is for any young couple.

#### A Northside Realty Attorney

This man handled rental property throughout the city. He handled primarily business buildings, but had two Indian renters in one of his apartment houses. One had to be asked to leave because of noisy parties and the heavy traffic of visitors. The other had been there many years.

#### A Northside Academy of Hair Design

We interviewed the receptionist. There were no patrons as it was time for student instruction. The receptionist told us that:

Twenty percent of our customers are Indian and there is one enrolled in the school. She is doing well although she had to drop back a class because she broke her arm. She isn't here today because she had to go to the doctor. She is not always pleasant, but I get along with her. As for differences, Indian hair is beautiful but it is sometimes so coarse we can't keep rollers in it. Concerning jobs, if Indians want work, they can certainly get jobs.

#### A Northside Barbershop

The mature lady barber with whom we spoke said she had had no problems at all with the Indians around her area. She said that there were only a small percentage of them that came into her shop -- the ones that were always neat in appearance and "clean-cut citizens." She didn't have any Indians working for her because it was such a small shop. She said that Indians' hair was very nice to work with because it was so thick.

A Northside Diner

The waitress, a woman of forty or fifty, lived in the area. She had worked here for a long time. She seemed quite negative in her opinions of Indians. She mentioned having been raised at Leech Lake and therefore having had much experience with Indians. She believed that most Indians leave the reservation because they can get better welfare and medical benefits here in the city. She estimated that at least 75% of the Indians did not work and did not want to. They had few Indian customers in \_\_\_\_\_'s and have had no trouble with them because the waitress would

kick them in the rear end. The young ones, especially the boys, are really very bad. The whites around here don't mix with them except for some of the girls who date them.

A Northside Cafe

The waitress in this little cafe said they had an Indian girl working there about a year ago. She was a good worker and also worked for the owner's sister. One day she didn't come back. Finally a year later she showed up at the sister's expecting her job to be waiting for her. It wasn't and they knew no more about her. The woman had no idea why she left.

The have only two Indian customers, two men who were always drunk when they came in, day or night. Otherwise all their customers were whites with steady jobs in the immediate vicinity.

A Northside Barbeque Cafe

\_\_\_\_\_ 's has Indian and Afro help and patrons. We sensed tension at our presence, so we bought cigarettes and walked out without interviewing anyone.

A Railroad Station Cafe

We interviewed the lady cashier in the little cafe which is located in the \_\_\_\_\_ Railroad Station. She said she knew of an Indian girl who used to work there. She was a very hard worker and was highly thought of. One day she didn't show up and hasn't been back since.

A few Indians come in once in awhile but simply walk around and then leave. They are usually not in the best condition, but we have never had any real problems with them.

When asked if she thought it might be better if the Indians stayed up on the reservations she replied that she didn't know why they were coming down, unless there were no jobs up there.

#### A Northside Bar

The owner stated that they had few Indian customers. He was emphatic about there being no problems in the bar. The most common trouble occurred when young Indians were refused services for lack of identification--they got very angry and loud in their protest. No checks were cashed in the bar so there had been no problems in that regard. The owner said that many Indians had good jobs in construction, but because of the current strikes, he hadn't seen as many of the Indians in the place as in the past. He stated that Indians could "make their lives whatever they want."

#### A Second Northside Bar

We had been referred to this bar by someone we interviewed down the same street. The interviewer there had said that \_\_\_\_\_'s was the "white bar" in the area. Down the block further were two "black bars" and then an "Indian one." He said it was okay to go in \_\_\_\_\_'s but to steer clear of the others. He said he had worked in the area since 1942 and that he would not walk down that street on Friday night after dark.

\_\_\_\_\_ 's was an average working class bar. There were no non-Whites present. The bartender became leery as soon as we identified ourselves as being from the University.

I don't know anything about Indians. They never come in here. There are white bars, black bars, and Indian bars. They don't mix and don't want to.

When asked what he did when one came in, he said "We have our tactics--they never come in." He talked with us about other subjects but there was no more information about Indians.



### A Third Northside Bar

The bartender said there were very few Indians who came into his place. He tried to discourage them from returning, and he also tried to get them out before any real trouble started.

The Indians come in, order a beer, and go sit in a booth to drink out of a wine bottle they've smuggled in under their jackets. When they get real drunk and I try to tell them they better leave they call me "a white son of a bitch."

He didn't mind having blacks in his place because "they never cause problems." He said that Indians never look for work because they "get their money too easily from the government." At certain times of the month the bartender noticed a lot more Indians around. He guessed that Indians

Come off the reservation when they get their money to blow all of their money on booze and to raise hell. Women come in once in awhile but there are always at least two of them together. I've been here for fifteen years and those guys in the doorway across the street have been there with their bottles of wine as long as I have.

### A Fourth Northside Bar

This old rustic bar has natural woodland scenes painted on the walls. It had recently changed owners and will be panelled to give it a new image. It will become \_\_\_\_\_'s Bar. We decided not to disclose our purpose nor to interview anyone because of the earlier experience at \_\_\_\_\_'s. This was Monday morning. There were just a few customers in the bar. An older, heavily-bulit Indian man was leaning over his beer. A young Indian man walked in, used the cigarette machine and walked out. An older Indian woman came in with a non-Indian man. They each had a beer and she used the phone for an extended length of time. It sounded like a business call. There were three non-Indians in and out while we were there. We talked to the new owner, asking if he got good crowds on Friday nights.

We have an older crowd who comes in. They have a good time but we never have any trouble. It doesn't get wild. Indians have their own bar down the street. We don't have any trouble here.

He talked about the remodelling and various subjects. When we

referred to the Indian customers present, he explained that a few did come in.

The old chief (referring to the old fellow who had just left), is a steady customer. We never have any trouble with him though.

#### COMPANIES AND FACTORIES

##### A Northside Scale Company

The manager said that about four years ago they had tried to hire an Indian to do some welding for them. He had been sent over to them from the employment agency. The Indian just couldn't do it to their satisfaction so he had to be let go. He said that his company tried to be an equal opportunity place but they just didn't hire that many people.

##### A Northside Plant

The manager at this plant said they had a few Indians working here and that about fifty percent of them were women. Some of the Indians had been there for as long as fifteen years. They were all "very stable workers" and didn't "go running off to the reservation," we were told.

But you still get a few that last only a year and then they take off without leaving a word's notice. Others last only the first week, just as long as it takes to get their first pay check, and then they take off for a couple of days. A real problem we have with the Indians is that they can only move up so far in different positions and then they can't go any further. The main reason for this is that they haven't the education to help them qualify for the better jobs.

At the end of our talk he told us that there was a lot of pressure being put on them from the different agencies about hiring minority groups.

##### A Northside Lock Company

When we talked to the personnel manager about having any Indians working for them the man replied that "no Indians had ever applied for a job here." He said that their employees "usually come from another company and are already trained at their job." He didn't think that there were "any Indians in this sort of trade."

A Northside Envelope Company

When we questioned the personnel manager he told us that he had one Indian working there. The Indian had been there for about eight to ten years; he was a very steady worker and very dependable, which to the manager was the "most important thing." The man made rubber plates of type that had previously been set up by another man. The manager told us that the firm

Used to have another couple of Indians working for them a while back. They just came off of the street and asked for a job. They hadn't been sent over by any agency. They didn't last very long because they would work a few days and then they would skip work for a couple of days.

The manager said that he didn't care who they had working for them, just as long as they were dependable.

If someone missed work the whole system would stop. Each man is depended upon very much.

Another Northside Company

The personnel man to whom we talked said that he didn't know of any Indians coming in and applying for jobs. He said that there were no warehouse jobs or anything like that, just office work. All of their warehouses were in another location outside the city.

A Northside Electronics Company

A man working in the main office said that the had no Indians working for them at present, nor had they ever in the past. He didn't know of any Indians who had a degree in electronics.

The state has a law which says that you must be licensed before you can work for an electronics company. If I found an Indian that did have an electronics degree I would send him over to them and he would be hired.

At the end of the interview, the man said that the "Negro" feels very discriminated against and not liked, "so I have chosen not to like them."

A Northside Factory

While talking to the man in charge in the front office we learned that they used to have two Indians working for them about two years ago. The job was very easy and required them to work only a few days out of a week so he "never had any problems with them at all." The man knew an Indian family where the father was holding a "real good job" at \_\_\_\_\_ Hospital, without ever finishing high school. The Indian had taken some classes offered at the University to get his diploma. He said that "staying in the office all day" doesn't make it possible for them to come in contact with the public; therefore, they "don't see too many Indians around." He added: "there is one Indian that comes in here almost every other day wanting to borrow a dime from one of us, and we're glad to help him out."

A Northside Auto Supply Company

The owner of the place was eager to talk about his problems with Indians. He had one boy working for him up until about a month ago.

The Indian boy lasted only three months because he did cause a lot of problems. First of all the boy would work for a couple of days and then he would miss a day, then work one day and miss a couple.

The owner then said he gave the boy "three different chances" before he "finally had to fire him." The owner did have other problems with the same boy, though.

He caused a lot of fights with the people he was delivering supplies to. He also got drunk a lot and once in awhile he would talk back. I'm against the government giving money to the Indians. Indian reservations should be abolished completely, and the Indians should find jobs and try to blend in with everyone else.

The owner had once had another experience with a different Indian. He was walking out in the parking lot when a "huge, muscular Indian" came up behind him. He was very drunk and so the owner asked him if he wanted a quarter and the Indian said no, he wanted a dollar.

So the Indian said you'll give me a dollar if you want to walk out of this lot. So I gave him the dollar.

At the end of this interview the owner said it would be a "long time before he hired an Indian again."

A Northside Electric Company

This was a small firm which did electrical work. They employed seven or eight men, none of whom were Indians.

As far as I know, there are no Indians in the trade. I have never seen one sent out on a job. I have one really good friend who is an Indian. He is a truck driver. He stops in every once in a while. I met him up by Red Lake where I grew up. There aren't any big differences between Indians and us. We all drink the same, all have the same reaction. There isn't any big difference in the city either. They keep to themselves and we keep to ourselves. There's no trouble.

Up at Red Lake, they are self-disciplining. If someone gets drunk and causes trouble, his friends from the reservation give him a hard time because they will all get blackballed otherwise.

When asked what he meant by this, the man explained that "the merchants will just close the stores to all Indians for a while if one causes trouble. They've always done that."

A Tentative Summary of Interviews With Northside Agencies

While the people interviewed were not overtly and outwardly prejudiced, they did have a common stereotype of a drunken, lazy, uneducated and uncivilized Indian person who is satisfied with his lot. Some of their beliefs are based on an experience with a few Indians, while even those with comparatively great Indian experience did not often indicate that they were generalizing from a limited, Indian slum population.

Indians seem to be divided on whether or not to emphasize their Indianness. One young man we interviewed was quite embarrassed about being Indian and explained that he wasn't raised by the Indians. He was dissociating from them all, probably because he believed in -- or thought we believed in -- demeaning stereotypes. Two young Indian people who were deeply immersed in government titles and positions, threw us out of their office for suggesting that there might be a place for a well-meaning, non-Indian. They appeared to believe that only an Indian can help an Indian. It seemed to us that personal jealousies and bickering must be so prevalent in Indian planning activities that discouragement is a constant threat.

There seemed to be a big difference of opinion about Indians on \_\_\_\_\_ Island and on West \_\_\_\_\_ Street. There is a different Indian population in each area, and the feelings toward Indians reflect these population differences. There is less respect and trust of those Indians on the island. Primarily, the island is populated by derelicts of all races, who cause trouble for businessmen and others. There as elsewhere, jobs and drinking are the main problems of Indians. Invariably, an employer who has hired Indians has experienced the same usual pattern: They are good, hard workers who one day never show up again. Each time, the employer has not been able to determine a cause; they just don't return. \_\_\_\_\_ Discount had an Indian man for several months and "then he just never showed up again." Two cafes experienced this with waitresses, etc., etc. The same pattern emerged again and again. Most of the interviewees attributed it to lack of ambition and desire to work, while many believed that the Indian has easy access to government money, and to be sure:

Who in their right mind would work when he don't have to?

There was much criticism of the Indian's lack of a sense of responsibility on the job. Some places, like \_\_\_\_\_ (a large electronics firm) appear to bend over backwards by excusing absences, tardiness, and other digressions from company policy for Indians. The plumber's union in St. Paul also seemed to have a good policy. Special help has been given initially with arranging places to live, and with transportation. The Indians are counseled once or twice, but with a clear understanding that these jobs are highly competitive and if they wish to continue, they must compete with whomever is present. A \_\_\_\_\_ Island grocer held the other extreme, advocating tough, tight control, so that "Indians will respect authority and know their place."

One of the major problems is lack of training and education. A spice company, which hires several Indians, can never promote them because of their lack of education. Unreliability is another problem that recurred again and again. The librarian planned an Indian-related book festival. She set up a lecture by a guest Indian speaker from a Northside poverty program. But the speaker postponed his engagement several times and finally forgot about it. We doubt that she will ever bother to contact him again. The eyedoctor's receptionist said that Indians repeatedly "forget" appointments.

Whatever the reasons, lack of training, lack of ambition, lack of understanding, unreliability, prejudice, or desire for mobility, we found no Indians in other than the lowest levels of work. The only para-professionals were at Northside Poverty Program. Indians were reported as truck drivers, factory workers, waitresses, and salesmen.

Money and credit, a subject directly related to jobs, is another area of contention. Those Indians coming right from the reservation usually have no credit.

It seemed to us that Indians fall into two categories: the new, or recycling; and the established Indian who has held a job and lived in the city for a period of time. The latter is, and has, no problems. The man in the loan company said he had had no problems with payments. The furniture store agreed. It seems that when an Indian has established enough to make big purchases, he

does keep them up. No one gave us a percentage of those accepted against those who applied. Problems occurred repeatedly in a store that cashed checks, but not only with Indians. Their stringent check-cashing policies are general. The mobility of the Indian population was also mentioned as a problem, and the fact that they usually had no identification. (Sometimes, it was stolen or borrowed.) There is often no way to find Indians after a bad check incident. One case of a stolen government check was brought up. Many interviewed people said that Indians were not wise with their money -- they "always have it at the beginning of a month, but are asking for a loan by the 20th." The man from \_\_\_\_\_'s Discount said that if they have a dollar, they spend it. The man from the Salvation Army thought it better for them to stay on the reservation so that someone can guide them with their money. Grocery clerks commented they bought very frugally and wisely.

The "drunken Indian" is the last consideration of this summary. Opinions ran the gamut. The Island opinions were usually negative:

Indians have been drunk in that doorstep for fifteen years I've been working here, and they'll outlast me.

I don't put a drink down until I have the money in my hands.

There is nothing worse than a drunk, mean, Indian.

But several men who have Indian drinking friends say there is no difference in their reactions. The drugstore has problems with Indians stealing shaving lotion and rubbing alcohol to drink.

However widespread the "drunken Indian" actually is, his image is very prominent. It causes a negative effect on the whole Indian population.



### A Summary of the Service Area

People performing services tend to have direct personal contact with customers and, therefore, some very strong opinions depending upon their experiences. People working with the medical, job training and loan services have different reports from those supplying food and drink services.

The professional services group had much less contact with Indians. The chiropractor had no Indian patients, the dentist one a month, and the beauty school had one Indian enrolled. The chiropractor's hypotheses that the poor seek medical aid only for major problems is doubtless a useful observation. This other thought, that the government may provide these services, could also be valid. The dentist said most of his Indian patients were on ADC. The eye doctor said that most of his patients were children of welfare recipients referred by the schools. The only problems noted with Indian patients were 1) payment, which was usually adjusted for them or paid by some agency; and 2) the failure to make and keep appointments (mentioned by the eye doctor's assistant). The only physical difference noted was the dentist's finding that adult Indians have poorer teeth than the general population.

The personnel in barber and beauty shops had no negative comments or experiences with Indians. Many Indians went to the beauty school and none to the beauty shop (the fact that the price has nearly tripled in the latter probably explains why). The characteristic texture and thickness of Indian hair was noted; the barber liked cutting it, but the beauty school reported difficulty in setting the basically straight hair of Indians. One barber discriminated against any "long-hairs"--not only Indian long hairs.

The business man dealing with realty and loans seemed to group Indians in two categories. One type, with whom they avoid any dealings and another, the dependable, proven Indian who has established himself with a job and credit over a period of time. The latter is considered a "good bet."

Cafe and diner people have had experiences with Indians as employees and as customers. Two people had employed Indian waitresses, to have them simply not return one day with no word before or afterwards. This is a repeated

pattern mentioned by nearly everyone who has hired Indians. They do very satisfactory work and then just stop coming, for no reason discernable to the employers.

Indian customers are a different story. Problems mentioned included drunkenness, lack of money at periodic times, loud and boisterous manners, theft, hostility, and impoliteness (particularly by young men). One owner was vehement in her objections to Indians as "dirty, greasy and grimy" creatures. The cook in her establishment seconded that opinion with the statement, "The only good Indian is a dead Indian." They regarded the Teen Center as a meeting place for the Indians to form gangs. It seems that the higher the proportion of Indians, the worse the opinion of them by non-Indians. The woman who lived in the community held Indian youth in very low regard, but people who knew Indians on reservations felt the Indians had a much better style of life in the city. Some instances were cited of theft. Some Indians have apparently tried to leave without paying their bills. One woman complained of destruction but then admitted it was hearsay.

The biggest problem area concerns alcohol. This was another area where people were reticent to talk freely with us for at least two reasons: first, the fear that we were some civil rights group; second, the fear of discouraging prospective customers. Several owners repeatedly stressed that they had had no problems. Several alluded to the fact that there are Indian bars, White bars, and Black bars, but avoided answering how they were kept that way. The bars on \_\_\_\_\_ Island had very low opinions of their Indian patrons. They were usually classified as drunks, and winos who "come down to raise hell" or to "get out of the weather." Many people mentioned that Indians "get mean" when they drink, and many felt that this was their "worst problem." The overwhelming consensus was that the Indian controlled his own life--if an Indian wanted a job, he could get one, or if he desired to drink excessively, he could. By and large, people consider the Indian lazy and prone to heavy drinking.

#### A Summary of the Retail Stores Area

The eight food stores were divided in stating whether the Indian

bought predominantly just sweets and non-nourishing foods or nourishing staples. Therefore, we would tentatively say that Indian buying habits are probably not too different from other poor food shoppers. One store mentioned that the teenagers did the shopping. Another store mentioned that Indians buy the "cheapest cuts" but added that they can do marvelous things with their food. One fruit market owner said that he didn't have any Indian customers, and that as far as he was concerned they could take their business elsewhere.

The two discount and variety type stores were rather hostile toward the Indians: "They shoplift and curse you out to your face and their checks bounce. Frankly, we're afraid of them." One owner said that he felt that "everyone on the avenue has the same trouble--they have money on the first but then ask for a couple of bucks by the twentieth."

In the four clothing stores there was a mixture of answers from those very suspicious of Indian "stealing" to one that encouraged the Indians to come back (a clothing store). We were surprised to learn that they were buying clothes that we would consider too expensive for ourselves. The younger Indians also liked the high fashion and more mod-looking clothes. Some stores have had several regular Indian customers over the years and credit has been no problem. However, overall, most of the stores had given no credit of any kind to anyone. One leather store noted that Indian women bought raw leather products but never finished goods, implying that they made their own clothes.

The four auto retail stores were much like the discount stores. Employees had some strong opinions about the "wild and mean" Indians (those with "no sense of responsibility"). On the other hand, they felt some Indians were hard workers, and that some had good jobs and no particular problems ("once you have their friendship they will befriend you anytime.") One auto store owner said that he treats everyone as a human being and that he could see no special reason why Indians have trouble getting a job ("besides, the government gives them money so that they don't need to work.")

In the four liquor stores Indians came and mainly bought wine, because it is the cheapest. One owner gave a cigarette to promote his business, implying that he needed the Indians' business. One owner was impressed by one steady customer that he has had for years. He knew this Indian's family fairly well and he felt that although this Indian drank heavily, there did not seem to be any marital problems. (This amazed him in regard to his other customers who drank as much, but who had all kinds of marital problems.)

Employees of two drug stores and a flower shop indicated hostile feelings toward Indians ("all of them are on AFDC and come to get the pill," or "Oh, come to think of it, we did have some trouble with Indians a while back--they had just come down to the city and were stealing rubbing alcohol and after-shave lotion to drink"). The flower shop owner only saw drunks and young Indians going around causing trouble.

Finally we have four furniture stores--two selling good, expensive furniture and two cut-rate and used item stores. One store from the expensive category and one from the used had hired Indians, and both had a much greater understanding of the Indian and the different types of Indians. Both stores had excellent recommendations for their workers, and one mentioned that a certain family could "walk in anytime" and put on credit "anything they wanted" in the store--the owner would not hesitate to give them the credit they needed. The used item store owner mentioned that Indian families who bought his wares were very hard on furniture, to the point that 2-3 years usage would only last 6 months in an Indian home. When we asked if he felt that this was because of their lack of experience with furniture, he seemed to agree. One of the cut-rate stores mentioned sourly that their furniture was too good and expensive for the Indians; therefore, they did not have any Indian customers. One of the clerks in an expensive store mentioned that one saw both the "very smart" Indian furniture shopper and the "ignorant" Indian shopper who didn't know the first thing about furniture.

A Summary of the Companies Area

The managers of the different companies seemed, on the whole, to be very pleased with the work of the Indians who had been there for some time. Yet, there was much upset with others who had worked for a few months or a year and then either left the job or were fired. The personnel manager of the \_\_\_\_\_ Company felt exactly this way. He had an Indian who worked for him for fifteen years, and was very pleased because the Indian was so dependable. He also had a couple of Indians who had come off the street and obtained work, but who did not last long. They would continually skip work for a few days. \_\_\_\_\_ Plant is another place that had the same thing happen--the plant had a few Indians who worked very hard and with whom the manager was very pleased, but there was also experience with Indians who lasted only until the first pay check came out.

In gathering these data we began to notice that there seemed to be fewer people who were against Indians than for them. However, one man, the owner of \_\_\_\_\_ Auto Supplies, seemed to be a little more along the negative line than anyone else. He was the only person who said that it would be a long time before he would ever hire an Indian again. But he did seem to have his problems with Indians, and may have commented so because he was a little upset with them at the moment.

Indians of the Urban Slums:  
Field Notes from Minneapolis.  
Shovbrotten, Wolens.

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